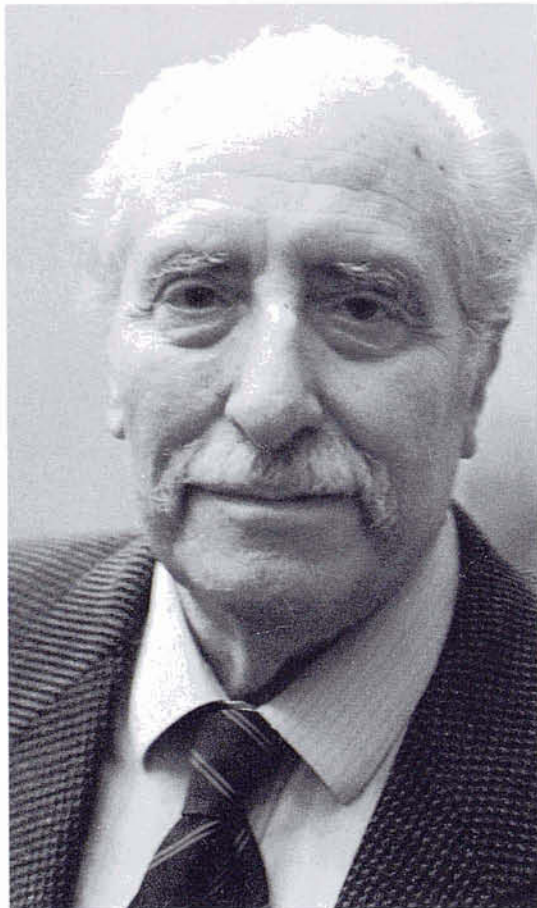


M. VILLANGÓMEZ LLOBET

M. VILLANGÓMEZ IS A WRITER WHOSE BALANCED WORK, WITH ITS HIGH LITERARY QUALITY, HAS EARNED HIM A PLACE AS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CATALAN POETS THIS CENTURY.

ÀLEX SUSANNA AUTHOR



THE AGE OF LOVE

Like a hidden seed, struggling to sprout,
breaking the tender earth in which it
grows.

Like a hive of obstinate, sharp seeds.

The pain of deep roots, the coming
flower,
the birth of a thousand dreams en-
trenched in the flesh,
the very hum of angry blood.

In men love grows like an ancient
spring.
From oldest Adam comes this quivering
stream,
the roar that bursts on reaching the age
of man.

The deep flame in the voice, the
wounded body's new burden,
the ardent gaze searching for consola-
tion.
Enflamed obedience to the highest
crushing order.

Like a cruel law obliging dreary
pleasure,
Love twines around the bones that
would flower in joy.
The unwieldy flesh opens to great mar-
vels.

Virile ardour seeks to wound like a
sword.

A woman's body is beautiful when
shaped by love
into an angel, a fire, a precious booty.

The striving of the tree in flower, the
beast's blind assault,
insufferable anxiety that chokes the
breath of men.
Deep heavens must be dug for such de-
mands.

Love searches the fields for the loneliest
heart.
Youth is vanquished by the suggestive
touch.
Suppressed force is forgotten in a
nearby body.

We must kiss or bite, die of love or
fury,
surrender to the dominant, provoking
rose,
sink into the folly of obsessive light.

The child grows toward the anxiety that
makes him man,
heir to an endless missive, prince of a
reign in flames.
Life will fade in the pleasure of the
spark,
the secret, troubled May that will break
forth tomorrow.

M. Villangómez Llobet
(From *El cop a la terra*)

M. Villangómez Llobet (b. Eivissa, 1913) is one of the most important of the "classic" contemporary Catalan writers –that is, a writer whose balanced work, with its high literary quality, and his personal record of clear civic values, have in his own lifetime earned him an unchallengeable reputation as a model far removed from the fights and squabbles that always cast a shadow over any contemporary artistic scene, so obsessed in recent years with fashions, prizes and exaggerated or over-hasty promotion campaigns. In full "extraterritoriality", as Steiner would say, Villangómez has unhurriedly but steadily turned out a great work which, though taking poetry as its starting point, has branched out into other literary forms such as fiction, essays, the theatre, translations of foreign poets, or even history, erudition and linguistics. But his well known versatility must not make us forget that, first and foremost, Villangómez is a poet, and subsequently, all his work bears the imprint of this original activity. As a poet, he is author of nine books –*Elegies i paisatges* (1949), *Terra i somni* (1948), *Poemes mediterranis* (1945), *Els dies* (1950), *Els bens incompartibles* (1954), *Sonets de Balansat* (1956), *La miranda* (1958), *El cop a la terra* (1962) and *Declarat amb el vent* (1963)– which mark a poetic development of great interest and originality in modern Catalan poetry.

At the same time, it is equally important to mention his book *L'any en estampes* (1956), a minor masterpiece which alone places him amongst the best Catalan prose-writers of this century. In it, he skilfully recreates –over the space of one year, 1953– life in a village in the island's interior, from the twin viewpoint of actor and spectator. He also wrote *Eivissa. (La terra, la història, la gent)* (1974), a work of a historical, geographical, sociological, anthropological and cultural nature, an indispensable book for anyone wanting to increase

their understanding of the idiosyncratic Mediterranean island of Eivissa.

Rereading the poetry of Marià Villangómez Llobet, you realise that one of the things that most characterizes it is the fact that it has grown, it has branched out and born fruit in abundance; it gives the impression of being, on the one hand, tightly closed, on the other, wide open within itself. It therefore gives the impression of having developed, in all naturalness, to the limit of its possibilities. This is why it gives rise to a two-fold sense of uniformity and unity. The work is characterized by the harmonious and spontaneous coexistence of a wide range of motifs, which at the same time are given different formal treatments. In this respect, the work of Villangómez is a real prodigy of studied and wise spontaneity: there is as much spontaneity in one of his ardent love sonnets as in the delightful decasyllabic group dedicated to the Flemish school of Renaissance painters or the powerfully flowing free verse in which the whole of *El cop a la terra* is written. Few Catalan poetic works give such a profound impression of carefree birth and development as Villangómez's.

There are works that grow in fits and starts, in which each new book is a landing in unknown country. There are others, on the other hand, that progress, that develop slowly and deliberately, and each new book is a gradual annexation of new lands. Needless to say, the work of Villangómez Llobet is one of these. The whole of his work is marked by a gently rising curve, which closes onto itself in the end, in wonderful unity and diversity. Villangómez is the kind of poet to whom both reality and language have always come easily, and this is what explains the extraordinary wealth of subject matter and formal register that abound throughout his poetic corpus. And this can also be said of his other work, because Villangómez belongs to the class of total writer –so characteristic of our century– who, taking

poetic creation as his starting point, develops simultaneously on other fronts –prose, drama, translation and criticism–, forming a whole of unfathomable beauty.

It is this interrelation and interaction between different literary forms that can help to understand the reasons for the magnitude of Villangómez's poetic work. Part of his strength and wisdom comes from his years of peaceful and profound contact with his island; an island he has come to know as intimately as one might a body, and which for this very reason has finally revealed all its secrets to him. An island which in his case, as W.B. Yeats would say, has been no more than the glove he has put on to reach for the universe. And this universality, while arising from his ties with the land he loves so much and the detail and patience with which he has come to understand it, he owes to his contact –years of peaceful and profound contact– with the best authors of western poetic tradition (fruit of which are the three volumes –English, French and Italian– of complete translations, which bring together by languages his extensive career as a translator). In translating Shakespeare, Keats, Hardy and Yeats, or Baudelaire, Laforgue and Apollinaire (authors to which he has devoted single volumes), Villangómez has put himself at their side and has learned and adopted all he needed to fill his life with great poetry. This is why his work gives the impression, in the opinion of the poet and critic Tomàs Garcés, of a "huge lyrical diary". Like Josep Carner, Josep Sebastià Pons or Joan Vinyoli, Villangómez is probably one of the Catalan poets of this century who has found most poetry in his life, who has best accomplished the difficult feat of making his own life into a life for sharing, because very often a book is no more than the story of the person who has written it, but raised to the level of meaning in which one's life, in a way, becomes everybody's life. ■